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United States  
General Accounting Office  
Washington, D.C. 20548

National Security and  
International Affairs Division

B-274602

August 14, 1997

The Honorable William S. Cohen  
The Secretary of Defense

Subject: Navy Aviation: F-14 Modernization Initiatives Should Enhance the  
Aircraft's Operational Performance

Dear Mr. Secretary:

This letter is to inform you that we have completed our review of the Navy's efforts to modernize the F-14 fleet. This letter discusses the Navy's modernization initiatives. We found that in making these modifications, the F-14 community used effective acquisition initiatives. Therefore, we are making no recommendations.

#### BACKGROUND

The F-14 Tomcat has been the Navy's premier air defense fighter for over 20 years. In May 1994, in response to a requirement contained in the Fiscal Year 1994 Defense Authorization Act (P.L. 103-106, section 128), the Navy advised the congressional defense committees that the F-14 fleet would be retained to 2010. At that time, the Navy would begin to retire the F-14s and replace them with the next generation fighter, the Joint Strike Fighter. Under the Navy's 1994 plan, which was reiterated in the Department of Defense's March 1996 Annual Report to the President and the Congress, retirement of the F-14 would be completed in 2016.

The Navy has altered its plan, and it now intends to begin retiring the F-14s in 2001 and replacing them with F/A-18E/Fs rather than waiting to replace them with the Joint Strike Fighter. Under the current plan, according to F-14 program officials, retirement of the F-14s will be completed in 2007 instead of in 2016.

#### F-14 MODERNIZATION INITIATIVES

The Navy has upgraded the multirole capabilities of the F-14 by providing it with a precision-strike capability (LANTIRN), a digital flight control system, and an enhanced reconnaissance capability.

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transmit near-real-time imagery, via secure UHF radio, to the battlefield commander. Since May 1997, carrier battle groups have deployed with F-14s that have TARPS-DI capability. According to the F-14 program office, the total estimated cost of this program is \$8.6 million.

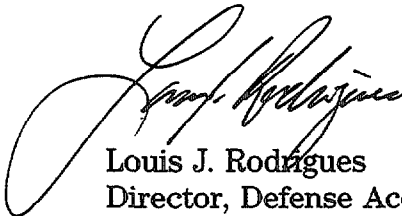
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We appreciate the assistance provided to our staff during this review. The F-14 program office reviewed a draft of this letter and we have incorporated its comments as appropriate.

We are sending a copy of this letter to the Secretary of the Navy and to the cognizant congressional committees. We will make copies available to others on request.

Please contact me at (202) 512-4841 if you or your staff have any questions concerning this letter.

Sincerely yours,



Louis J. Rodrigues  
Director, Defense Acquisitions Issues

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